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London, V

[1848]

17.

A MODERN ELIXIR OF LIFE.

To the Editor of the British Medical Journal.

SIR,—In your leading article in last week's JOURNAL on this subject you did not mention diabetes amongst the diseases that may be combated by the use of the lactic acid bacillus. I am informed, however, by a patient who has just returned from Carlsbad that this is the treatment at present in vogue there. In relation to this I may perhaps be allowed to quote from an article I wrote in the BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL, February 21st, 1874, p. 224:—

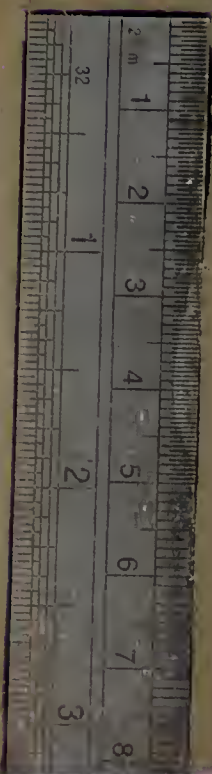
The form in which I always recommend it (lactic acid), however, is that of buttermilk, as this quenches the thirst, supplies food, and also contains a ferment, which, if absorbed, may be useful in aiding the conversion of sugar into lactic acid within the body. I am inclined to attribute the benefits occasionally derived from the use of skimmed milk to its possessing similar properties to buttermilk; but I consider the latter superior. When it is allowed to become very sour, and all its milk-sugar has been converted into lactic acid, before it is used, it would probably be still better. I first heard of the use of sour buttermilk from an old woman in the country many years ago. She was loud in her praises of its efficacy in wasting diseases, and had striking cases to narrate by way of illustration. The manner of employing it which she recommended was to put the buttermilk into a large vessel, and add a fresh quantity every few days to replace what was drunk. The vessel was not to be washed out, so that a little of the old and sour milk always remained and quickened the formation of acid in each new addition.

A word of caution as to the use of the lactic acid bacillus may not be out of place. When the pure culture is added to fresh milk the result is generally good, but if a second supply of milk is inoculated from the first, it may happen that the *Bacillus butyricus* has found an entrance, and so contaminated the second batch of milk as to render it exceedingly irritant. Metchnikoff's recommendation of the *Bacillus acidi lactici* as a means of prolonging life may be well founded, but at the same time another remedy, which, as he informs us (Metchnikoff, *The Study of Man*, p. 257), was used by Lord Bacon to lengthen life, ought not to be neglected. This remedy is nothing else than saltpetre, which probably in Lord Bacon's time did not consist of pure nitrate of potash, but contained a considerable portion of the nitrite. The use of both the remedies mentioned by Metchnikoff I discussed in a paper on longevity about two years ago.¹—I am, etc.,

London, W., Sept. 22nd.

LAUDER BRUNTON.

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